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AN EDITORIAL BY  
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## **PASS THE 9/11 REFORMS NOW!**

It's a miracle. In the middle of a presidential election in a politically polarized nation, on the most important issue facing our generation, the 9/11 Commission agreed unanimously on how to reform America's intelligence system in order to beat terrorism.

Five strong Republicans and five Democrats actually came to public agreement after examining the facts of that terrible day. Maybe there is hope.

People are noticing. The 9/11 Commission Report is an unlikely best seller. It's painful to read the facts, but everyone wants to know what really happened on 9/11 and how to stop another attack.

Who are these commissioners? They're not household names. The stars — people like Henry Kissinger and Rudy Giuliani — were too busy to serve or had too many business conflicts. But these folks rose to meet a major league challenge.

The White House did not want the Commission to be created or, once established, to complete its work. Only the passion of the 9/11 families allowed the Commission to do its job. They could not rest until they learned what really happened to their loved ones.

*Your* family will determine whether the Commission is successful — whether its recommendations are ever implemented. It will take a lot of pressure to persuade Congress to act on the Report because it means reforming Congress itself.

Don't take my word for it. On page 419 of the Report, the Commission writes,

"Of all our recommendations, strengthening congressional oversight may be among the most difficult and important. So long as oversight is governed by current congressional rules and resolutions, we believe the American people will not get the security they want and need."

Surely no congressman would stand in the way of better security for the American people! Think again. Some of the needed reforms have been kicking around Washington for almost 50 years!

I am the only Tennessean in the U.S. House or Senate to serve on the Armed Services Committee. During two days of hearings this week, I heard lots of witnesses who claimed to favor the Report but who had hidden agendas. Several were extremely good at sweet talking and slow walking the Report onto another dusty shelf.

What does the Report say? Simply put, the 9/11 Commission proposes that one individual, appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate, be responsible for coordinating the fifteen U.S. intelligence agencies. (Right now, believe it or not, no one is minding the store.) And Congress would have to cut the size of its intelligence committees and add budget authority in order to improve secrecy and clout.

Many congressmen don't want to give up turf. They spend years getting on a certain committee and don't want it to lose power. They certainly never want to be told to get off a committee. They often refuse to ask tough questions in hearings because they don't want to anger special interests or their party leaders.

The Pentagon is against reform too, although they are afraid to admit it publicly. Despite numerous intelligence failures in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Pentagon insists on controlling 85% of intelligence spending without accepting 85% of the responsibility. For example, the Pentagon has paid millions in taxpayer dollars to Ahmed Chalabi, an Iraqi expatriate, who has turned out to be at best a crook, and at worst an Iranian spy.

The intelligence agency with the best record in recent years is actually located in the State Department, but has consistently been ignored by the Defense Department.

Please read the 9/11 Report and give me your thoughts. It is a fascinating look at the new form of war that we will probably face for the rest of our lives. It also describes common-sense ways that we can better defend our nation while preserving as many of our freedoms as possible.

My opinion is that we should build on the bipartisan insights of the Commission and bring our intelligence agencies into the 21st century. Congress should declare a truce on its partisanship and turf wars and implement most, if not all, of the Commission's recommendations before it's too late, before we are caught unprepared again. If not us, who? If not now, when?

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